

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR
IMMIGRATION SERVICE

OFFICE OF SUPERVISING INSPECTOR
MEXICAN BORDER DISTRICT
EL PASO, TEXAS

918-922 MILLS BUILDING

February 5, 1918.

IN ANSWERING REFER TO

No. 5002/800

Commissioner-General of Immigration,
Washington, D. C.

Referring to my letter of November 21st last, relative to the enforcement on the Mexican border, of the joint order (Consular) 535, entitled, "Control of Persons Coming to the United States During the War", and in connection with which the suggestion was made that the Army be called upon to render further assistance with a view to more carefully guard against the surreptitious entry and departure of enemy aliens and agents, it is desired to say that, in order to more definitely ascertain what is actually being accomplished in this respect, the several inspectors in charge have been called upon to submit reports showing what assistance, if any, is being rendered by the Customs, Department of Justice, State, County and City officials, as well as the Military. Copies of the various reports received are transmitted herewith in duplicate, and for the convenience of the Bureau, the situation along the entire border is herewith summarized:

BROWNSVILLE, TEXAS.

The Inspector in Charge at this station has immediate jurisdiction over that portion of the border extending from the Gulf to Roma, Texas, and has 19 officers and employees serving under his direction. There are at present 6 vacancies in this sub-district. This shortage, coupled with the additional work arising from the requirements of the new Immigration Act, the passport provisions and co-operation with the Public Health Service, the Department of Justice, and the Military, necessitate the devotion by the remaining officers of pract-

ically all their time to work in the immediate vicinities of the three ports of entry,- Brownsville, Hidalgo and Rio Grande City,- thus permitting but slight attention to the task of preventing illegal crossings. The Customs Service, the Department of Justice, the State, County and City officials are not rendering any substantial assistance in this particular class of work, although their failure so to do cannot be ascribed to any lack of willingness but rather to the fact that these agencies, numerically relatively small, are uncoordinated, lacking in centralized authority and control, each with its time and energies fully engaged in the exercise of those functions peculiarly its own. The Military has stationed in the territory under discussion between 2300 and 2400 troops,- just how many of whom are engaged in preventing illegal crossings, it is not possible to state; it may be said, however, that the Military is very effectively patrolling the district in this section, and it is reasonably certain that the number of illegal entries and departures are in consequence reduced to a minimum. This satisfactory situation is due, in a great measure, to the continuation of a policy adopted about two years ago as a result of bandit raids in the Brownsville section.

LAREDO, TEXAS.

The inspector in charge at this point has immediate supervision of the border from Roma, Texas, to a point half way between Laredo and Eagle Pass. He has within his jurisdiction 19 officers and employees. There are two vacancies.

Laredo being the most important point in this subdistrict, 18 of such officers and employees are necessarily engaged upon work there and in the immediate vicinity. Included in this number are clerks, watchmen and a number of inspectors, who naturally devote none of their time to guarding the border. While some scouting and patrolling is done, the work is necessarily limited, for the reasons pre-

viciously explained under the Brownsville caption.

The Customs Service, Department of Justice, State, County and City officials render very little positive assistance in the particular line of work under discussion, though manifesting a desire to co-operate to the extent of their ability. State rangers have been sporadically assigned to duty at Laredo, and when they have given attention to this class of work, their efforts have been singularly effective. The Military have established several outposts in this sub-district, but on the whole, the patrol in this section lacks the systemization which characterizes the Brownsville district.

EAGLE PASS, TEXAS.

The inspector in charge at this station has immediate supervision of the border from a point on the East, half way between Laredo and Eagle Pass, to a point on the West about midway to Del Rio, Texas. This officer has under his jurisdiction fifteen inspectors and employees. There are two vacancies at present. The situation at Eagle Pass is almost identical with that obtaining at Laredo, for which reason, detailed discussion thereof would seem unnecessary.

DEL RIO, TEXAS.

The inspector in charge at this station has supervision of the border from a point on the East midway between Eagle Pass and Del Rio to Comstock, Tex., on the West. He has three inspectors and a watchman under his immediate direction, and there are at present four vacancies (3 inspectors, 1 clerk). The situation at this point, so far as guarding the border is concerned, is substantially the same as at Laredo and Eagle Pass, and practically the same inadequate means are available to prevent illegal crossings.

BIG BEND DISTRICT.

This section of the border is, roughly speaking, bounded on the North by a line from Comstock on the East to Sierra Blanca on the West, and while it is nominally under the supervision of this office, it has in fact, received but negligible attention, owing to the impossibility of securing a sufficient number of officers to spare to cover the region. For the past several years officers have been detailed to that section from time to time for temporary emergency duty. Provision has been made for the stationing of two inspectors at Boquillas and for two at Presidio, but so far, it has not been possible for the Bureau to supply the men. While there are three or four customs officers performing duty in that section and a few state rangers, their time is so fully occupied with their own affairs that they are able to afford but scant assistance to this service. This section is one of the most lawless in Texas. The Military at present assigned thereto has headquarters at Marfa, on the main line of the Southern Pacific, about 70 miles north of Presidio and outposts stationed at various towns along the railway, as well as a few at border points. It is understood that the Military is doing considerable patrolling, just how effectively the writer can only conjecture. It is understood, however, that the Military is exerting unusual efforts to cover the border in the section under discussion because of the several bandit raids that have occurred there in the recent past.

EL PASO, TEXAS.

Here are located the headquarters of the district. The territory tributary to El Paso is the most difficult on the border to successfully guard, due to the fact that El Paso is the largest city in point of population on the border and affords greater inducements and opportunities to alien enemies and

others engaged in unlawful enterprises to evade the officers of this service. The territory directly controlled by patrols from El Paso extends from Sierra Blanca, Texas to Hachita, N.M.

This service is the only one making any positive, systematic effort to prevent illegal crossings. It has fifteen mounted watchmen who devote their entire time to this duty. Ordinarily several inspectors are more or less continuously engaged in investigations in and about El Paso and the territory tributary thereto, but owing to the number of vacancies which have occurred and still exist and the vast increase in the work growing out of the enforcement of the more rigid Immigration Act, these special investigators have been compelled to give their time and attention largely to more or less routine matters.

The Customs Service, Department of Justice, State, City and County officials, render no substantial assistance. The Military have several thousand troops located within the territory under discussion and maintain outposts, largely for the purpose of guarding the railroad lines and bridges and public utilities. The Military is not, in a literal sense, doing any border patrol work worthy of the name, such assistance as it is able to render along this line being of secondary importance and essentially incidental to the more serious work of military training.

DOUGLAS, NACO AND NOGALES, ARIZONA.

These stations will be discussed as a group, the situation obtaining at each of them being almost identical. There is an inspector in charge at each of the stations named, controlling the territory from Hachita, N.M. to the desert country West of Nogales.

The personnel in this section is made up of 11 inspectors and three clerks.

There is one existing vacancy. It is physically impossible for these officers to give more than scant attention to the prevention of illegal crossings. and other civil departments are aiding only in an incidental way. The Military have several thousand soldiers scattered throughout this section and in the immediate vicinities of the three stations mentioned effective assistance is being rendered in guarding the border for a short distance, not to exceed one mile in any instance. Aliens discovered in attempts to enter or depart are directed by the Military to the nearest immigration office. There are a number of outposts stationed at points more or less remote from the stations mentioned, but these are not performing service in a positive way to prevent illegal crossings.

AJO, ARIZONA.

Provision has been made for two inspectors at this point, but no one is at present available for assignment thereto. The desert section of Arizona, extending from a point a short distance West of Nogales to Yuma, is covered from Ajo. There is no branch of the Government service performing any active duty in that section, unless it be the Military and to just to what extent, if any, the latter is operating, the writer is not informed, in fact he is convinced that no active patrol is maintained.

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA BORDER.

There is one immigrant inspector stationed at Andrade (Yuma, Ariz.), five inspectors and one clerk at Calexico, one inspector at Campa and one clerk and four inspectors at Tia Juana. There are five vacancies in this section. By reason of the many additional demands on the time of these officers and employees, they are able to give but little attention to patrol duty. Officers of other branches of the Government, excepting the Military, are rendering

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no substantial assistance. The Military have a considerable number of soldiers scattered throughout this district at present, doing some effective work. The officers in command express a willingness to extend their patrols but state the limited number of troops available renders such a course of action impossible.

In discussing this subject, the writer wishes it clearly understood, that he does not in any sense of the word intend a criticism of any other branch of the Government Service, for none knows better than he that every Government agency is doing all it can in the circumstances. A splendid spirit of cooperation is manifested on every hand, but as hereinbefore intimated, it seems to the writer that too much energy is being dissipated in uncoordinated effort, and that if the various war measures are to be made truly effective, the responsibilities of the different organizations must be more specifically defined and their activities more thoroughly systematized. The quota of every organization on the border should be completed and the vacancies existing in the Immigration Service particularly, should be filled at the very earliest possible moment. / There are too many loopholes along the border and illegal entries and departures is only one of the many problems which should be more vigorously dealt with.

The purpose of the passport regulation is, presumably, mainly to prevent communication through Mexico with the enemy.

The Customs Service is charged with the duty of detecting persons in the act of carrying communications to and from Mexico. Such efforts as are made in this direction must obviously be futile so long as the mails and telephone lines remain uncensored.

The Customs Service, with which all other services incidentally cooperate, is charged with the enforcement of the Enemy Trading Act^s, but in the

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Nature of things, the restrictive measures employed cannot be made effective until a sufficiently extensive patrol is provided to prevent the smuggling of merchandise.

The Department of Justice is primarily charged with the duty of preventing alien enemies from entering and leaving the United States. In this, the Immigration Service is cooperating to the limit of its ability, but so long as the border is not adequately guarded, the restrictive measures employed at ports of entry, simply tend to divert the illegal traffic to unguarded points, of which there are literally thousands.

These matters are referred to more or less incidentally, as it is not unlikely similar representations have already been made by other branches of the Government to their respective departments. As previously pointed out, there is not an organization on the border, except the Military (and that only in a limited way) prepared to even approximately accomplish the tasks confronting us.

It goes without saying, that the Government is anxious that every means of communication with the enemy through Mexico shall be shut off; to accomplish this the border must be patrolled, and means of swift communication established.

While the Military cheerfully lends every assistance within its power when called upon, yet the scope of its authority seemingly extends only to the prevention of violations of neutrality laws. It seems to the writer that this arm of the Government should be specifically charged with the duty of requiring all persons and merchandise to be presented at the regular ports of entry. The writer is not unmindful of the fact that the primary task of the Military at this time is to train and equip an army for service in France, but at the same time in the accomplishment of that great undertaking, the fact should not be lost sight of that we have a na-

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tion to the south of us which has never been, and probably never will be, a loyal supporter of the United States and its principles, for which reason no assistance is received, nor need any be expected from that quarter. The writer, of course, is not prepared to consider whether any part of the military now in training can, or should be diverted from the primary objects in view. This consideration aside, however, it would certainly seem that some steps should be taken to perfect an organization to guard the border. If the services of men now being drafted cannot be spared for this work, it may be that the various departments vitally interested would give favorable consideration to the formation of an independent organization, composed of men without the draft age. The assertion is ventured that such an organization, properly equipped and trained, made up of seasoned men, familiar with border conditions, numbering say, from 2000 to 3000 members, would guard the border more effectively against all forms of lawlessness than a body of soldiers of several times the same number, drawn from all parts of the United States, totally unfamiliar with the border country, its people and their customs.

It would not seem necessary, or even advisable, for such an organization to be constituted along rigid military lines, or for it to follow army formulae in its daily activities. In other words, it is felt that those features of army organization, training and discipline best adapted to meet the peculiar conditions obtaining on the border should be retained and those found inappropriate or impracticable rejected. Certainly the most rigid military discipline should prevail, and in order to make for permanency, some form of enlistment would, doubtless, be desirable. These, however, are matters which need not, for the purpose of this letter, be discussed in detail at this time.

The outstanding feature of such an organization would be its elasticity,

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permanency and intimate familiarity with border problems, conditions which, in the very nature of things, are impossible in a patrol composed of regular army units with continuously shifting assignments.

The writer has for years been impressed with the need for the establishment on the Mexican border of some special organization, similar perhaps to the Northwest Mounted Police of Canada, whose duty it would be to prevent violations of the Customs, Immigration, Public Health and other Federal statutes, and this view is not confined to the writer, but is, on the contrary, held by many persons familiar with border conditions. By reason of the existence of a state of war, a patrol such as the writer has in mind, would of necessity, be larger than in peace times, but its numerical strength could be curtailed with restoration of peace or otherwise, as conditions might warrant.

If the suggestions advanced herein should meet with a favorable reception, and it should be desired to give the matter serious consideration, now or in the future, the writer would esteem it a privilege to be permitted an opportunity to confer with the Bureau and such representatives of other departments of the Government as might be interested, as he has given the subject much thought and has, he believes, some practical ideas of value along the lines indicated.

(Signed) F. W. Barkshir

MWD.

Incl. 46321.

Supervising Inspector.